

Central Region Connections

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Sweeter the second time around for new Central Region Administrator

Robert Blackwell's past will serve him well as the new Central Region Administrator. His first DCFS "tour of duty" ran from 1984 until 1992, when he held several management positions including personnel, resource development, quality assurance and licensing. Blackwell left DCFS to carve out a new path for making his own contributions to several Springfield community service endeavors. Now, as of November, he is back at DCFS, taking the reigns of the agency's largest region.

"I am a social worker by training and by spirit. I grew up with parents who were always in service to someone else and that shaped my view of the world. I saw coming back to state service as my purpose and a calling," said Blackwell.

Yet, in his time away from the Department, Blackwell was anything but idle. Through his consulting company Ujima Management Consultants, he had a hand in shaping community service programs to address housing, race relations, law enforcement and youth enrichment. The seeds of his work are sprinkled throughout the Springfield area.

He also serves the community through involvement with the Boys and Girls Clubs and the Springfield Mayor's Race Task Force and the Public

School Minority Hiring Task Force. Prior to his new DCFS role, he held a post on the African American Family Commission, a state-appointed panel that reviews policy and advises DCFS.

Now he is on the "other side of the table" and is responsible for imple-



Robert Blackwell

menting some of the very recommendations he was once making.

"I feel I have an understanding of the impact of quality care. Particularly with the state funding situation, we will have to make adjustments within a very challenging context," said Blackwell.

In his first several weeks as Regional Administrator, Blackwell focused on getting a solid leadership team in place. Now, they are getting over the

resources and making plans to meet the needs across the region.

"I want to honor the good work that has been done. Yet, I know that we are challenged everyday to do better. I would like to be a part of our moving from good to great," he said.

In pursuit of great, Blackwell said meeting with foster and adoptive parents will be high on his list. After spending time as a Resource Development Manager in 1984, he was able to see first hand just how much caregivers truly give.

"These children belong to us and have needs that go beyond food, clothing and shelter. I hope that people will find me active in working with them to provide care at the highest level of quality," he said.

From shadowing his parents, to his Army days of counseling enlisted men, to his volunteer work to develop positive outlets for kids, Blackwell has been committed to building stronger families. His return may seem like "déjà vu all over again", but Central Region should enjoy the encore.

Robert Blackwell works out of the DCFS Field Office in Springfield, located at 521 S. 11th Street. He can also be reached at 217-782-4000.

Breaking the ice when meeting the birth parents gets easier for everyone

Working with birth parents is one of those concepts that sounds good and seems right, but can still be tough to do. In the Peoria and Rock Island sites that are piloting the Family to Family model, that first awkward meeting got a bit easier with the “Icebreaker.”

The “IceBreaker” meeting is a new format to bring together the foster parents, birth parents and agency staff person within the first week of a new placement. The goal is to reduce the child’s trauma upon moving by building healthy relationships between the adults in his life. The meetings create an avenue for communication so that the foster parent can get better information about the child and the birth parent can know more about the child’s well-being while in substitute care.

In most cases, this initial meeting at the start of a placement will serve the caregiver, the birth parent and the child well. However, if there are safety issues, the meeting will not take place.

Furthermore, the meetings are never held at the foster parent’s home, but at a DCFS or agency office or other community location. Only first names are used and no phone numbers or addresses are exchanged.

The IceBreaker meetings take 20 to 30 minutes, and follow a structured format to keep the meeting on track. Both the foster and birth parents will receive a discussion guide in

advance of the meeting to help them prepare.

When the meeting takes place, they will have a chance to ask questions to help everyone adjust to the new placement. The birth parent can let the caregiver know about the child’s likes, favorite toys, allergies or bedtime habits. These little details can help the foster parent better meet the child’s needs or just feel more comfortable in a new setting.

The birth parent may have questions about where their child is living. The foster parents answers can be general, such as, “we have children of our own and foster children in our home” or “your son shares a room with another five-year-old boy.” The caseworker is primarily there to observe and to make note of any case planning that may need to happen.

The IceBreaker meeting will be effective when all the participants remain focused on the child’s needs. Each should also recognize the importance that the other individual has in the child’s life. It is also important to respect the feelings, opinions, cultural differences and ideas of others. Finally, everyone should also remember to keep what is said as confidential.

Foster parents in the Family to Family sites, should look forward to the Icebreaker meetings when a new child comes to the home. Contact your caseworker with questions.

Foster Parent Role

- Reviews the IceBreaker discussion guide and materials before the meeting and follows the guidelines
- Reacts to statements by the birth parent in a non-judgmental way
- Encourages the birth parent to share information that will aid in the care of the child
- Provides information about his/her family and the child to help relieve the birth parent’s anxiety
- Does not make any agreements with the birth parent that have not been approved by the caseworker
- Refers any questions on case planning to the caseworker
- Reassures the birth parent that it’s the foster parent role to support the Department’s goal of Return Home

Birth Parent

- Reviews the discussion guidelines prior to the IceBreaker meeting
- Adheres to the guidelines provided and keeps discussion child-focused
- Provides information to the foster parent that will ease the child’s transition
- Does not discuss reason why child came into care or other case planning issues

Caseworker

- Provides a familiar face for both the birth parent and the foster parent
- Assists in keeping the discussion child-focused, however the primary goal is to observe only
- After the meeting, follows up on any red flag issues that are presented by the foster or birth parent

Christmas spirit spread warm clothes and good deeds throughout region

The Central Region took Governor Blagojevich's call for warm winter clothing to a whole new level. In response to the "Keep Safe and Warm" campaign, many regional offices created very festive collection bins and collected more than 1,400 items of clothing from offices throughout the region.

In addition, offices around the region went beyond the call of duty to help families. Following are snapshots of some of the memories that were made during the holiday season.

Champaign: Upon hearing that a teen in residential would go without Christmas gifts, staff stepped up and canvassed the office for donations. They purchased presents to make Christmas special for the youth who was successfully managing health and emotional issues.

Decatur: Staff made a contribution so that a child from the community could participate in the annual "Shop With a Cop" program. Two area credit unions also collected gifts to be distributed to intact families, as well as to children in substitute care. The Peoples Church of God invited foster children to select gifts for their families from their "Christmas Shop." In addition, the local domestic violence program DOVE, Inc. provided Christmas food baskets for 10 local families.

Charleston: The Broadway Christian Church again provided DCFS families with enough gifts to line the hallway from one end to the other. The CFO staff hosted a tree trimming and decoration party for foster parents and children.

Galesburg: Norwest Bank once again graciously provided toys for children. Most donations for our clients were handled through Bridgeway Family Services. The Knox County Child Advocacy Center provided gifts and food for families who had contact with that agency.

Ottawa: Staff coordinated matching and delivering gifts to families purchased by donations from many community businesses and organizations. One donor also provided grocery cards to help families with food needs during the holidays.

Pekin: Money collected for nominations for the dubious

Turkey of the Year" award was donated to the local Salvation Army as part of the Red Kettle Drive. Grace Methodist Church donated presents for almost 200 children and DCFS staff distributed them. The office also supported Shop with a Cop, sent gifts to students in the Youth in College program and volunteered with community agencies.

Peoria: Staff saw families in need and took steps to fill them. Efforts ranged from trimming one family's tree that would otherwise have been bare to gathering donations to support other families. Many individuals made contributions from their own funds to help the families they serve professionally.

Princeton: The entire office works on getting the children and families' Christmas lists matched to the various organizations. The office was filled with wrapped presents, bikes, toys, coats, boots and Christmas trees, and case-workers played "Santa."

Quincy: Working with the Quincy Jaycees, hundreds of gifts went to children in Adams, Hancock and Pike counties. RSVP in Hancock County also provided afghans to families.

Springfield: Christmas Angels, consisting of local businesses, social service agencies, churches and staff, donated money and presents for DCFS youth. Everyone pitched in to wrap the gifts and then the caseworkers and investigators delivered the presents and Christmas food baskets to families.

Taylorville: Through donations from community and church groups, US Soldiers in Afghanistan and local staff, 45 children were provided with presents and clothes. The shopping time and the gift wrap were donated. Staff volunteered to deliver the presents to the families.

Urbana: The Urbana Field Office hosted a Christmas Party for all DCFS foster parents and children in their care. The staff contributed by donating presents and a visit from Santa and the Illini Men's and Women's basketball teams made it extra special. Refreshments from Monical's Pizza and Silvermine Subs added to the holiday spirit.

Central Region Training Calendar

FosterPRIDE In-Service Training

All licensed foster parents and adoptive parents are welcome to attend PRIDE In-Service Trainings to enhance their skills and meet yearly training requirements.

Module 1 - Foundation for Meeting the Developmental Needs of Children at Risk (four 3-hour sessions = 12 hours)

Module 2 - Using Discipline to Protect, Nurture and Meet Developmental Needs (three 3-hour sessions = 9 hours)

Module 3 - Module 3 was combined with Module 4

Module 4 - The Sexual Development of Children and Responding to Child Sexual Abuse (three 3-hour sessions = 9 hours)

Module 5 - Supporting Relationships Between Children and Their Families (three 3-hour sessions = 9 hours)

Module 6 - Working As A Professional Team Member (three 3-hour sessions = 9 hours)

Module 7 - Promoting Children's Personal and Cultural Identities (two 3-hour sessions = 6 hours)

Module 8 - Promoting Permanency Outcomes (three 3-hour sessions = 9 hours)

Module 9 - Managing the Fostering Experience (two 3-hour sessions = 6 hours)

Module 10 - Understanding the Effects of Chemical Dependency on Children and Families (five 3-hour sessions = 15 hours)

Module

Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church 1534 S. Easton Avenue, Peoria	April 4, 11 & 18 (Mon) 6:00 p.m. - 9:00 p.m.	4
Lutheran Social Services 3000 W. Rohmann Ave. W. Peoria	June 2, 9 & 16 (Thur) 6:00 p.m. - 9:00 p.m.	6
Black Hawk College Outreach Center 301 Avenue of the Cities, E.Moline	April 11 & 18 (Mon) 6:00 p.m. - 9:00 p.m.	9

Educational Advocacy

(Two 3-hour sessions = 6 training hours)

It is mandatory for one foster parent in each family to attend this training in order to be re-licensed. Educational Advocacy is offered following each FosterPRIDE/Adopt PRIDE training and many additional times. This six hour course covers information foster parents need to know so that they can advocate for their foster children's educational rights and needs.

PEORIA AREA 888-507-7433

Black Hawk College
Technology Center
3930 11th St., Rock Island
April 25 & May 2 (Mon)
5:45 p.m. - 8:45 p.m.
June 11 & 18 (Sat)
9:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.

Carl Sandburg College
2400 Tom L. Wilson Blvd., Galesburg
April 25 & May 2 (Mon)
6:00 p.m. - 9:00 p.m.

Catholic Charities
548 Crosat, LaSalle
April 28 & May 5 (Thurs)
6:00 p.m. - 9:00 p.m.

Children's Home
404 NE Madison, Peoria
June 30 & July 7 (Thurs)
6:00 p.m. - 9:00 p.m.

Lutheran Social Services
3000 W. Rohmann Avenue, W. Peoria
May 2 & 9 (Mon)
6:00 p.m. - 9:00 p.m.

Macomb, Location to be announced
April 12 & 19 (Tues)
6:00 p.m. - 9:00 p.m.

Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church
1534 S. Easton Avenue Ave.
April 16 & 23 (Sat)
9:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.
May 31 & June 7 (Tues)
6:00 p.m. - 9:00 p.m.

Additional Foster Care Trainings

Regional V First Conference
March 31- April 3, 2005
"Building Bridges"
Kalamazoo, Michigan

Illinois Foster and Adoptive Parent Association is joining Indiana, Michigan, Ohio and Wisconsin for a conference designed for adoptive, foster and kinship families.

Contact Gladys Boyd at 773-720-0669 or Regina Boyd at 708-568-6263.
Conference brochure is available at www.ofcaonline.org.

National Foster Parent Association
"Back to the Future"
35th Annual Education Conference
Orange County, California
May 6 - 14, 2005

800-557-5238 or www.NFPainc.org

For more information or to coordinate transportation from Illinois, contact Gladys Boyd at 708-748-8670.

**Call Blackhawk
College at
888-507-7433 to
register for
in-service training**